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THE JESUS OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

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In a recent number of the *Biblical World* I called attention to individual utterances put in the mouth of Jesus by the author of the Fourth Gospel which seem to be reminiscent of certain sayings of his found in the Synoptic Gospels. The fact that there are very few such utterances was made evident; and the conclusion was reached that the Fourth Gospel cannot be depended on as an authority in an attempt to set forth the thought of Jesus as a teacher. There is another side of the Jesus who is presented to us in this Alexandrian gospel that needs more attention than it has received, the side that has to do with his conception of his own person and mission, especially the latter, although it is very difficult to separate the two. Scholars have often noted the fact that the author of this gospel represents Jesus as alluding to himself in words that are in striking harmony with his conception of him as a supernatural personage, the Divine Logos; but they have not sufficiently set forth the fact that the author's Jesus is wanting in pity for the poor and compassion for the sick and the maimed, that in short he is far removed from anything that may be characterized as humanitarian.

The Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels is nothing if he is not humanitarian in his sympathies and in his everyday ministries. How often we read of him that he was moved with compassion (ἐσπλαγχνίσθη)! Now it is the widow of Nain, the body of whose only son is being borne to the burial (Luke 7:13); again it is the blind men by the wayside near Jericho (Matt. 20:34); yet again it is the famished multitude (Matt. 15:32). The maimed and the sick seem to have specially stirred the fountains of his pity (Matt. 14:14). But he was also moved because the common people, the masses, as we would say, were woefully wanting in leadership, because they were like unshepherded sheep (Matt. 9:36; cf. Mark 6:34). So largely was Jesus' ministry one of alleviation or of cure of the physically broken that we

read frequently of such unfortunates finding their way to him or being brought to him in large numbers (Matt. 4:24; Mark 6:55). Every allowance may be made for the growth of legends having to do with stories of Jesus' wonderful cures; nevertheless it must be admitted that he seems to have been one who, according to the earlier gospel narratives, was most deeply moved in the presence of those suffering from physical maladies. Nor did he, according to the Synoptic Gospels, ignore the poor, for he is frequently pictured as very sympathetic in his treatment of such. As he conceived of it his gospel was a message specially addressed to them (Matt. 11:5; Luke 4:18; 7:22). He had no money to give them, save as it may now and then have been taken from their common purse as a loosely organized band of itinerants; but he encouraged those possessed of means to relieve the needy (Matt. 19:21; Luke 14:13, 21). Though we may admit that the gospels reveal traces of Ebionitic coloring, surely the Third Gospel does, we still must assert that Jesus was profoundly concerned for the poor. It is a significant fact that can never be ignored by students of the life of Jesus that when John sent an embassy of inquiry Jesus welcomed its members and after they had been given sufficient time to get the gist of his message and form an unbiased conception of his ministry he sent them back to John with the suggestion that they tell him that at his hands the blind are made to see, the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, the lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised, and to the poor the gospel is preached (Luke 7:22). So also is it significant that the disciples whom Jesus sent forth were charged to perform substantially the same ministries (Matt. 10:8; cf. Luke 10:9).

Again we should not fail to note as most characteristic of the ministry of Jesus, as it is set forth in the Synoptic Gospels, his endeavor to reach and recover to society those who were looked upon, not without good reasons, as outcasts, the publicans or taxgatherers, the professional prostitutes, and those who belonged to the criminal classes, the sinners, as they were called. He not only believed that the publicans could be redeemed (Luke 19:9, 10; Matt. 21:31, 32); but he also believed that there were reputable men among them (Luke 18:10ff.). He was happy to have publicans and members of other classes outside the pale of the supposedly reputable society of

his day come to him and enjoy his ministry. Nor did he shrink from being known as the friend of such (Matt. 9:10, 11; 11:19). When upon occasion he was charged with keeping company with such outcasts he defended himself by remarking that they, rather than the sound or whole, needed him. Upon another occasion when rebuked by the Pharisees for eating with publicans and sinners he excused himself by uttering that marvelous trinity of parables having to do with the lost (Luke 15:1ff.).

But Jesus was also sympathetic in his treatment of widows (Mark 12:42, 43; Luke 4:26; 7:12); while children found in him one in whom they could most lovingly confide. Modern students of childhood find Jesus' treatment of childhood most sane and inspiring. Not a least hint of the Calvinistic conception of such life as unregenerate and depraved can we find in Jesus' attitude just here. Children are his little ones, a hope, a joy, an inspiration to him always. Most tender and loving is he when among them; and this is saying much for one whose ministry was in the open where children are most likely to be found and where they are bound to interrupt if not to annoy.

In the Fourth Gospel we find not a trace of such humanitarianism as we have found abundant evidences of in the other gospels. Not once is Jesus spoken of as manifesting pity or compassion. He does not inculcate either; nor does he appear as so much as noticing either. The very words are wanting. Even the sick are not mentioned; nor are the maimed or otherwise afflicted, save in a few stories of miracles. And these are given in a way thoroughly characteristic of the gospel. There is no suggestion of compassion on the part of Jesus for the impotent man whom he is said to have healed at the Pool of Bethesda. He appears to have healed him in defiance of the sabbath laws of the Jews as though to arouse their enmity by making them conscious of his power. The blind man was restored because he, Jesus, must work the work of God and because he must reveal his oneness as a worker with God. The fact that the man finally worshiped him is mentioned as though it were the climax of the story (9:38). The nobleman's son was healed as though either to provoke or perchance to reward unusual faith in him (4:46-54). We are told that Jesus manifested his glory by the miracle of Cana (2:11). No intimation

is there that he was personally concerned over the chagrin of him who gave the feast because the old wine was running short. Too much may easily be made of the fact that he is said to have wept at the grave of Lazarus; for he tells his friends he is glad he was not present earlier (11:15). Lazarus' death was conceived of as furnishing him a supreme occasion. Even the story of his feeding the multitude is without a hint of compassion on his part. It is introduced by a mathematical discussion between him and Philip which is calculated to reveal how utterly improbable it would be for the disciples to attempt to feed them by resorting to common methods of supply (6:5ff.). It certainly is noteworthy, for it is thoroughly in keeping with the character of this Fourth Gospel, that in the story of Jesus' walking to his imperiled disciples upon the Sea of Galilee the comforting assurance found in both Matthew and Mark, "Be of good cheer," is wanting. We have only the startling announcement: "It is I; be not afraid," as though knowledge of his presence were enough without the words of sweet assurance.

Thus we see that Jesus' miracles, according to this gospel, find their occasion in him rather than in man's suffering or need. They are signs, works wrought to bear witness of him (5:36; 10:25). We are told that early in his ministry many in Jerusalem believed in his name because of the miracles they witnessed (2:23). But nowhere throughout the gospel is there any mention of the sick or maimed being brought to him as a healer who might be expected to have pity upon them. He appears as too exalted a personage to be touched with pity for the unfortunate, or even to have compassion upon human frailty and sin. Early in his ministry, as here pictured, he is said to have asserted not "Ye hereafter shall see the sick healed, the maimed restored, and the poor gladdened," but "Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (1:51).

In this gospel the publicans and harlots do not appear.¹ There is nothing about the author's conception of Jesus to lead us to suppose that he thought it possible for him to be interested in such outcasts. Even the masses of the common people play but a small part in the

¹ Text-criticism has shown that the section (8:1-11) did not originally belong to the Fourth Gospel.

narrative. Jesus' interest is in the few rather than the many, in his disciples who are supposed to be capable of apprehending his mystical thought rather than in those who seemed incapable. Here the poor are not ministered unto; and to them the gospel is not preached. Only once is he said to have alluded to them and then in the story of the anointing, a story found in early tradition in a simpler form. This is all the more noteworthy because the words seem so foreign to Jesus' treatment of such unfortunates (12:8). Neither as a class nor as individuals do widows come before him as exciting his compassion; and not a solitary child brightens the pages of the narrative. If Jesus is represented as using the term "little children" endearingly in addressing his disciples it may be because in the author's thought their association with the Master has endeared and glorified them rather than because he conceived of the term as a common one to Jesus.

But to say that the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel is not the humanitarian of the Synoptic Gospels is to tell but part of the story.

The Jesus whom we meet in the earlier narratives is one who has a passion to serve and to save. He seeks the needy and the outcast not only because they move him to compassion but also because he feels that it is his mission to serve and to save the lost. He has come not to be ministered unto but to minister, he tells his friends (Matt. 20:28). "I am among you," he declares upon another occasion, "as he that serveth" (Luke 22:27). The very verb "to serve" appears in the Fourth Gospel only in a passage in which Jesus is represented as speaking of being served rather than of serving (12:26). There is, it is true, the story of his washing his disciples' feet, a story which does not elsewhere appear (13:4 ff.). This symbolic act is said to have been performed as an example. It may be considered as revealing supreme condescension; but as an example it was unhappy, for no self-respecting man would allow anyone but a paid menial to perform such services.

We must not fail to notice that the Jesus who appears in the Fourth Gospel as wanting in compassion for the unfortunate and pity for the sin-laden is one who is supremely interested in his own person. His is a self-centered instead of a world-centered life. What he is and how men regard and treat him are of supreme moment. The personal

pronouns appear most frequently and most prominently. It is: "I came down from heaven;" "I came forth from the Father;" "Before Abraham was I am;" "I am not of this world;" "I and my Father are one;" "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" "I am the bread of heaven;" "I am the light of the world;" "I am the good shepherd;" "I am the door." True he alludes to himself as coming not to condemn but to save the world (3:17); but here his conception of salvation has changed most radically. According to this gospel eternal life is to be divinely bestowed upon those who believe in him (5:24; 6:27, 40, 47). To do the will of God, or the work of God, one has only to believe on him whom he hath sent. This is a mystical thought far removed from the noble simplicity of the Synoptic Gospels.

It has long seemed to many, and will still seem to them, that the Fourth Gospel supplements most admirably the other gospels, not alone because it gives us the deeper thought of the Master, but also because it completes our picture of his person and his mission. It may be unwise, if not vain, to antagonize this view; but one thing should appear most clearly—that we of today cannot afford to lose the humanitarian side of Jesus' life and ministry as this appears in the earlier gospel tradition. Never have the needs of the world been known as they are now known; and never has compassion been more prized and honored. A passion to serve, and to serve intelligently and efficiently, possesses many hearts. If Christianity plays the part that it ought in the great work of individual recovery and of social redemption it will be largely because Christian workers go to the Synoptic Gospels rather than to the Fourth Gospel, because they see that Jesus was nothing if he was not tender and pitiful and that he cared little what men thought of him if only they could be moved to do the will of God as reputable members of society and as lovers of their fellow-men.

Students of Tennyson's life have not failed to notice the happy change which came over him during the first two decades of his poetic career, a change in the direction of greater simplicity of style and of deeper interest in human life. Nowhere is this growing interest in life more marked than in his sea poems. The earlier, *The Kraken*, *The Merman*, *The Mermaid*, *The Sea-Fairies*, and *The Lotus Eaters* are poems of pure imagination. Man as man finds in them no place.

But in his later poems having to do with the sea the interest is in real life. Such poems as *Enoch Arden*, *Sea Dreams*, and *The Sailor Boy* pulsate with interest in human life. Its sufferings, its struggles, and its aspirations are of supreme concern to the poet. In Jesus' career as a teacher and helper of his fellows there seems to have been no such transition. From first to last he was supremely interested in man and most tenderly compassionate, as generally he seems to have been radiantly optimistic. No greater calamity could befall the Christian world than to lose sight of this fact as it would do were it to neglect the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels for the mystical, self-centered Jesus of the Fourth Gospel.